

House committee cuts AIDS education fund

Budget panel votes against public awareness campaign

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Saying Texans are flooded with information about AIDS, House budget writers Friday rejected a proposal for a state-funded campaign to teach the public more about the deadly disease.

The House Public Health Committee had earmarked \$3.7 million for an AIDS public awareness campaign, but the Appropriations Committee voted against including the funds in the Department of Health's communicable disease program.

Rep. Richard Smith, R-Bryan, described the proposal as a "waste of money."

"If that's all they're doing, just a public awareness campaign, it's on the front page of every national magazine," Smith said. "It's in the paper every day."

"I don't see that that's a worthwhile expenditure."

The Department of Health is seeking the money for use in Texas, where more than 2,000 people have been diagnosed with acquired immune deficiency syndrome. The Senate Finance Committee has targeted \$3.5 million for AIDS education.

Rep. Nancy McDonald, an El Paso Democrat who pushed for the AIDS funds in the Public Health Committee, said the Appropriations Committee made its decision based on "totally false information."

She said health professionals, such as school nurses, have sought information about AIDS from the state. "They look to the health department for this information to be accurate. We don't want it from the front page of a newspaper. We don't want it

from *Newsweek* or *Time*."

The information also would have been targeted for "not just high-risk groups, but other groups in the general public — the young people, women who are considering pregnancy, people who are considering marriage. Those groups should be educated about dangers of AIDS," she said.

H.L. Miller, deputy commissioner for health department, said the state has about \$600,000 from a federal grant on AIDS education and testing, but only has \$50,000 left in federal funds for AIDS-related expenses.

Rep. Mike McKinney, D-Centerville, said the health department still would have the discretion to spend money on AIDS education with available funds in its communicable disease program. "I think we're emotionalizing something that we don't really have to deal with," McKinney said.

Miller, however, said an AIDS education campaign could only be done at the expense of other key programs if funds are not specifically provided by the Legislature.

"We would have to take it from some other program if we spent it for that," Miller said. "We'd have to take it from vaccines, or VD, or from some other program. We don't have spare money."

AIDS, first detected in the United States in 1981, enters the blood stream and destroys the body's ability to fight off other diseases. The disease, which is often contracted through sexual contact, is found mostly in homosexuals and intravenous drug users, although the number of infected heterosexuals is growing.